

**Testimony**  
**Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public**  
**Lands**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**United States House of Representatives**

**Hearing on H. R. 3094 and H. R. 2959**

**By**

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Mr. Chairman and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing and thank you for inviting me to express my views, and the views of our Coalition of National Park Service Retirees on the important topic of managing our nation’s national parks. I retired just over ten years ago from the National Park Service after a 32-year career, including serving the last nine years of that career as the Superintendent of Shenandoah National Park. I am now the Chair of the Executive Council of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees.

The Coalition now consists of 600 individuals, all former employees of the National Park Service, with more joining us almost daily. Together we bring to this hearing over 17,000 years of accumulated experience. Many of us were senior leaders and many received awards for stewardship of our country’s natural and cultural resources. As rangers, executives, park managers, biologists, historians, interpreters, planners and specialists in other disciplines, we devoted our professional lives to maintaining and protecting the National Parks for the benefit of all Americans – those now living and those yet to be born. In our personal lives we come from a broad spectrum of political affiliations and we count among our members seven former Directors or Deputy Directors of the National Park Service, over twenty-five former Regional Directors or Deputy Regional Directors, over thirty former Associate or Assistant Directors and over one hundred and thirty former Park Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents.

We strongly support H.R. 3094, the “National Park Centennial Fund Act.” We believe this Bill is much better than the Bush Administration’s proposed Centennial Initiative to increase NPS funding over the next 10 years that is incorporated in H.R. 2529. We applaud the efforts of Chairman Rahall and Chairman Grijalva for their vision and efforts.

Because we think it is a much better Bill, I will confine my comments to H.R. 3094. We offer the following thoughts on Sections of that Bill that might need attention or refinement.

### **Section 3: National Park Centennial Fund**

We support and applaud this Bill's intent to create a dedicated funding source for the Centennial Fund for each fiscal year from 2008 through 2017, a notable difference from the Bush Administration's proposal included in H.R. 2959. While we strongly believe in the concept of philanthropic support to National Parks, and note the huge values and benefits accrued to the National Park System since its inception, we have been very skeptical of the Administration's proposed efforts to generate additional funding by including a matching provision in the proposed legislation. Given what we've all witnessed over the past decade or so relative to the increase in greed in the corporate sector and declining ethical behaviors by both corporate and government officials, it is hard not to be suspicious about the motives of the "giving" organizations – especially commercial and some special-interest organizations - and the quid pro quo expected from, and sometimes provided by the recipient organizations. When coupled with the increased pressures placed on park managers to take advantage of the incentives offered by private money to offset declining budgets, we are very concerned about keeping national parks public and national.

### **Section 4: Program Allocation**

Developing the list of proposals as prescribed in this section is guaranteed to further stress an already cumbersome and lengthy project development and review process prescribed for the NPS, unless short but feasible deadlines are specified. As an example, review and approval of projects, authorized by the Fee Demonstration Program are frequently locked in years of review and approval through the mandated Development Advisory Board process. This leaves important fee money sitting in accounts, often for several years, awaiting programmatic approval and contributing to the perception that the fee money is not being effectively applied to projects in accordance with promises that have been made. Adding another \$100,000,000 to the annual process of project review and approval will challenge the system even more severely and could result in increasing years between nomination of the project and completion of it. We believe that careful project development and review is a critical component of a successful project. Congress has made its intentions clear that the NPS must exercise its expertise and due diligence to also assure funds are carefully spent. We know that Congress wants to see results, and the parks need results - during the birthday decade of the National Park Service, not the decade after it! But, Congress must also accommodate its expectations of project accomplishment with the Service's capacity to efficiently conduct the required project oversight. It is our opinion, and that of many national park professionals, that the current system and capacity of the NPS to carry out increased project review and approvals of an additional \$100 million dollar program is compromised.

## **A “Cultural Resource Program Centennial Initiative” is Needed**

We appreciate the identification of the “National Park Centennial Initiatives specified in subsection (b) of this Section, and especially the emphasis prescribed in subsection (d) for the “Education in Parks Centennial Initiative.” However, we believe this Section **glaringly omits** a “Cultural Resource Program Centennial Initiative.” It is important to reflect that over 60% of the three hundred and ninety-one units of the national park system were set aside by Congress and presidents to preserve our nation’s cultural heritage resources. Moreover, 100% of all our national park areas have cultural resource elements found in them that require management, and sometimes protection, consistent with law and the mission of the National Park Service.

National Park Service cultural heritage responsibilities are **fully equal** in status and stature to the National Park Service’s natural science and conservation mandates and need to be properly recognized as such. Our National Park System tells the full American story from the First Americans, to the landing of Christopher Columbus to recent sites of the civil rights struggles. The NPS preserves for the American public the site of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the New World, most of the major battle sites of the American Revolution and the Civil War, the homes of many presidents, sites associated with the Alaska Gold Rush, Japanese internment camps during World War II, and the story of the struggle for equality for women. The NPS holds all these in trust for the American people. These places, and the unsurpassed museum collections associated with them, tell the authentic, real American story spanning thousands of years. They are the best American History classrooms in existence. They are authentic places in an increasingly inauthentic world.

The National Park Service leads our nation and works with citizens, sister federal agencies, and local, State, and tribal governments to preserve the nation’s heritage through such well known programs as National Heritage Areas, the National Register of Historic Places, National Natural and Historic Landmarks, Historic American Buildings Survey and through a federal historic tax credits program and a wide variety of granting and assistance programs that touch every state and thousands of local and tribal governments each year.

All of these cultural heritage programs, in parks and external to parks, must not be precluded from consideration of receiving support through the Centennial Fund. Nor should the protection of our nation’s cultural heritage be so narrowly construed that it represents only “old historic buildings.” Assuming that the Line Item Construction program will cover the majority of work required in cultural resource management neglects the reality that maintenance of historic structures is only one small aspect (although a costly one) of what is required under law to care for the cultural resources the NPS is responsible for. Even these historic structures will not fare well in direct competition within the same category with high-dollar priorities such as new visitor centers and needed infrastructure projects.

There is evidence that cultural resources program management in the NPS has suffered serious problems and has declined in effectiveness over the past several years. To ignore the 115,000,000 objects, 67,000 archeological sites and 26,000 historic structures managed by the NPS by not according them the same level of importance in the Centennial Fund as the natural resources managed by the NPS is likely to compound the already serious problems.

It is essential that a Cultural Resource Management component be added to the initiatives proposed in this legislation. Similarly, the distribution of funds for these initiatives proposed in this section would need to be adjusted accordingly to reflect the addition of a Cultural Resource Management Initiative certainly as equitable as the other 10% Initiative Allocations. In subsection (d), we suggest reducing the allocation to the “Line Item Construction Program” to 20% to allow a “Cultural Resources Protection Centennial Initiative” to be added with an allocation of 10%.

#### **“Diversity in Parks Centennial Initiative”**

We believe the language in the “Diversity in Parks Centennial Initiative” might benefit from some refinement. For instance, the present language in 2(B)(ii) requires that each diversity proposal shall be designed “to make” NPS employees “and” visitors to System units “reflect the diversity of the population” of the U.S. This is a very stringent test if every proposal has to meet both, and to “make” that result possible ignores local and regional demographics in favor of national demographics that, in fact, may not be representative at all. The report itself might benefit from having a FACA-exempt advisory committee.

#### **“Environmental Leadership Centennial Initiative”**

We note somewhat of the same problem with the “Environmental Leadership Centennial Initiative.” It also requires that each proposal must “reduce harmful emissions, conserve energy and water and reduce solid waste production....” What about proposals that meet only one or two of these criteria, but not all?

#### **“Line Item Construction”**

We agree that “Line Item Construction” proposals should be consistent with approved park planning documents. However, we again alert you to the backlog of just getting “administrative approvals in place before or during the fiscal year for which funds are sought” (see previous comments). Excluding environmental compliance and project review and approval from funding consideration neglects the reality that most of any project’s effort is “up-front” in planning, design, environmental and cultural compliance, and project review - all of which is constrained by time and funding.

Frankly, we would not be disturbed if even smaller amounts of this “extra” Centennial money were to go to bricks and mortar, and even more of it to creating and imbedding new operating habits geared toward resource protection, communication of park values,

relating to emerging population dynamics, and providing quality lifelong learning for employees thereby continuously raising professional standards.

### **Section 5: Partnerships**

There is a long and rich tradition of philanthropic and non-profit partnership in managing and protecting national parks—as long as the history of the National Park Service itself. Clarification is needed to better articulate the values that a constructive philanthropic effort can bring to the table *in support of this legislation*. While this legislation rightly focuses on assuring a dedicated funding source for the Fund, it does little to seriously encourage philanthropic and Foundation efforts that can offer wonderful and powerful additive “margins of excellence” to the NPS. We believe the “No Contingency” clause is positive by not precluding projects simply because the originating park does not have a “cost-share partner.” However, should the proposal have such a partner and be able to meet all the criteria and provide the “margin of excellence” a philanthropic partner can provide, we believe it should strengthen consideration of the proposal and offer dramatic proof of what federal and private investment can bring to our parks. We urge the Committee to include in this legislation an expectation that all bona fide philanthropic and other non-profit partners, including the National Park Foundation, friends groups of all sizes and capabilities and the complete range of cooperating associations and educational and programmatic non-profit partners, be equally able to contribute to the long term benefit of the parks in our society. Doing so will reinforce the goal of using the Centennial decade as a way to prepare the national parks and the National Park Service for its second century to be as valuable to the nation and the world as its first century has been. Again, we make the point that philanthropic partnership must not replace inherent federal responsibility of managing and funding our National Park System, but can offer a meaningful and deep valuable addition to the federal effort, and can serve to further connect Americans to their national parks and the heritage they preserve for all of us, our children and grandchildren.

### **Section 6: Maintenance of Effort**

We appreciate the language in this Section that the Fund “shall supplement rather than replace annual expenditures by the NPS.....” However, we recommend that the same language be applied to the Congressional Appropriations process and to the Administration Budget process where language is frequently inserted to take back what has been given, or to assess costs against an appropriation, or to offset one appropriation with another. As you know, in practical effect this may be determined as much by the degree to which Appropriations Committee members support the intent as by the wording of the legislation. We recommend extraordinary steps be taken to obtain the

understanding and support of Appropriations Committee members for the intent behind the legislation, and we offer our assistance in doing so.

### **Summary**

In closing, we believe that this legislation represents an important step forward toward trying to solve the funding problems of our National Park System. The chronic underfunding of the National Park Service has been well-documented by the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), the Coalition of National Park Retirees, and the NPS itself. A decade ago, the National Park Service prepared studies of its present abilities to manage the natural and cultural resources entrusted to it. The reports determined that it employed only 25% of the staff needed to provide professional attention to natural resources and only 22% of the staff needed to care for its cultural resources! Practically speaking, this means that the national parks have been operating on only two-thirds the funding required to preserve, research, and interpret to the visiting public their collection of incomparable resources. Importantly, a decade later the Business Plans undertaken in our park units have identified the same types of shortfalls. Finally, the NPS has been struggling for years to address the so-called “maintenance backlog,” the funding required to attend to the deferred maintenance of visitor centers and other administrative buildings, roads and trails, housing, water and wastewater systems, as well as archeological sites and monuments. The National Park Service estimates its backlog at \$8 billion. By any measure, the \$2.4 billion in President Bush’s 2008 budget proposal, while generous when compared with recent NPS budgets, will not make much of a dent in this monumental shortfall.

The National Park Service should not only be the leading natural and cultural heritage preservation agency in the country, it should set the “gold standard” for the preservation of natural and cultural resources throughout the country and the world. The Centennial of the National Park Service presents the nation with an opportunity to attend properly to the needs of an agency that preserves reminders of who we are as a people and where we want to go as a community.

ALMOST A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, just before the creation of the National Park Service, the British ambassador to the United States, James Bryce, spoke to the American Civic Association on the subject of national parks and their importance to society. With great simplicity, he acknowledged the obligation to “carefully guard what we have got.” “We are the trustees for the future,” he charged. “We are not here for ourselves alone. All these gifts were not given to us to be used by one generation, or with the thought of one generation only before our minds. We are the heirs of those who have gone before, and charged with the duty we owe to those who come after....”

As this country begins to think about the Centennial of the National Park Service, it is appropriate that we have a serious conversation about parks and their value to our society, and the role we want parks and the National Park Service to play in the future. What is our obligation, as the trustees of these magnificent places, to our children and

their children? The upcoming Centennial provides an opportunity to think creatively about the kind of National Park Service we want for the next century and envision systemic changes for its betterment and ours.

We believe this legislation will be one of the many decisions and actions that must be taken during this Centennial to assure an appropriate future for our National Park System. We look forward to working with all partners to assure a bright future.

**END**